

**VALUE CREATION BY COMPANY-CONSUMER INTERACTION
– DECONI, BULGARIA CASE****Prof. Neviana Krasteva, D.Sc.**

Abstract: *The study investigates the value creation by company-consumer interaction on the example of the advertising agency DeConi, Bulgaria.*

Key words: *marketing, marketing mix, co-creation.*
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Co-creation is a management initiative, or form of economic strategy, that brings different parties together (for instance, a company and a group of customers), in order to jointly produce a mutually valued outcome.^[1] Co-created value arises in the form of personalized, unique experiences for the customer (value-in-use) and ongoing revenue, learning and enhanced market performance drivers for the firm (loyalty, relationships, customer word of mouth). Value is co-created with customers if and when a customer is able to personalize his or her experience using a firm's product-service proposition – in the lifetime of its use – to a level that is best suited to get his or her job(s) or tasks done and which allows the firm to derive greater value from its product-service investment in the form of new knowledge, higher revenues/profitability and/or superior brand value/loyalty.^[2]

Scholars C. K. Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy popularized the concept in their 2000 *Harvard Business Review* article, “Co-Opting Customer Competence”.^[3] They developed their arguments further in their book, published by the Harvard Business School Press, *The Future of Competition*, where they offered examples including Napster and Netflix showing that customers would no longer be satisfied with making yes or no decisions on what a company offers.^[4]

Within the study of Prahalad and Ramaswamy,^[5] they defined co-creation as “*The joint creation of value by the company and the customer; allowing the customer to co-construct the service experience to suit their context*” (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 8).

Prahalad and Ramaswamy^[6] suggested that in order to apply co-creation, the following fundamental requirements should be prepared in advance.

Terms	Definition	Manergerial Implication
Dialogue	Interaction between customer	Two-way connection instead of one-way selling strategy
Access	Allow customer to access the data	Create value with customer; beyond traditional value chain process
Risk	To monitor risk and gaps between customer and firm	Share the risk of product development with guest through communication
Transparency	Information among business is accessible	Information barriers should be eliminated to certain degree in order to gain trust from guest

In their review of the literature on “customer participation in production”, Neeli Bendapudi and Robert P. Leone found that the first academic work dates back to 1979.^[7]

From 1990 onwards, new themes are emerging: John Czepiel suggests that customer's participation may lead to greater customer's satisfaction.^[8] Scott Kelley, James Donnelly and Steven J. Skinner are dealing with productivity but suggest other ways to look at customer participation: quality, employee's performance, and emotional responses.^[9] Although not reviewed by Bendapudi and Leone, the groundbreaking article by R. Normann and R. Ramirez suggests that successful companies do not focus on themselves or even on the industry but on the value-creating system.^[10]

Michel, Vargo and Lusch recognize the influence of Normann on their own work and acknowledge similarity between the concepts of co-production and co-creation: “his customer co-production mirrors the similar concept found in FP6”.^[11] The authors suggest that Normann enriched the S-D Logic particularly through his idea of “density” of offerings.

In a letter sent to the editor of the *Harvard Business Review* in reaction to an article by Pine, Peppers and Roger (“Do you want to keep your customers forever”), Michael Schrage argues that not all customers are alike in their capacity to bring some kind of knowledge to the firm.^[12] Wikström sees the role of consumers changing.^[13]

Firat, Fuat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh introduced the concept of customerization (which is a buyer-centric evolution of the mass-customization process) and stated that it enables consumers to serve as “the co-producer of the product and service offering”.^[14] However, Bendapudi and Leone (2003) concluded in an empirical paper that “the assumption of

greater customization under co-production may hold only when the customer has the expertise to craft a good or service to his or her liking”.^[7] At the turn of the century, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) produced another important piece of work and built further on Normann and Ramirez's ideas.^[3]

In 2004, Prahalad and Ramaswamy kept working on their original idea published four years earlier.^[15] At the same time, Vargo and Lush (2004) published on the service-dominant logic of marketing. The process of value creation is dealt with in FP6. Opposing the goods-dominant logic and the service-dominant logic, the authors state: “the customer is always a coproducer”. FP6 will be later (Vargo and Lush, 2006) altered in “the customer is always a co-creator”.

Prahalad commented in an issue of the *Journal of Marketing* on Vargo and Lusch's FP6 and found that the authors did not go far enough.^[16]

In the same book, Kalaiganam and Varadarajan (2006) also follow Prahalad's comments and elaborate on the IT implications on coproduction. As the authors put it “developments in information technology [...] enable customers to create value by collaborating with the firm”. The main contribution of the authors in this article is a conceptual model of the intensity of customer participation as function of product characteristics, market and customer characteristics, firm characteristics. In their conclusions and directions for future research the authors deal with three promising topics. First they propose to study supply-side issues and how increasing communication, participation from the customers and the emergence of communities enable customers to interact between them, sometimes leading to new creations. Second they see the “locus of innovation” as of interest and in particular how the shift of firm-centric networks to user-centric networks can lead to increased innovation capabilities. Third they wonder whether demand-side issues may not result in negative consequences on satisfaction. The third issue is already mentioned by Bendapuli and Leone: “A customer who believes he or she has the expertise and chooses to co-produce may be more likely to make self-attributions for success and failure than a customer who lacks the expertise. A customer who lacks the expertise but feels forced to co-produce [...] may make more negative attributions about co-production”.^[7]

In the early 2000s, consultants and companies deployed co-creation as a tool for engaging customers in product design. Examples include Nike giving customers online tools to design their own sneakers. At a *MacWorld* conference in 2007, Sam Lucente, the legendary design and innovation guru at Hewlett-Packard, described his epiphany that designers can no longer design products alone, using their brilliance and magic. They are no

longer in the business of product and service design, he stated; they are really in the business of customer co-creation.^[17]

During the mid-2000s, co-creation became a driving concept in social media and marketing techniques, where companies such as Converse persuaded large numbers of its most passionate customers to create their own video advertisements for the product. The Web 2.0 phenomenon encompassed many forms of co-creation marketing, as social and consumer communities became “ambassadors”, “buzz agents“, “smart mobs“, and “participants” transforming the product experience. Other examples of co-creation can be found in arts.^[18]

During the mid-2000s, these innovations in customer engagement and collaboration expanded and morphed into global economic trends including the co-created development of products and services. Authors published bestselling books developing theories influenced by “co-creation” and customer collaboration. Major concepts included crowdsourcing, coined by Jeff Howe in a June 2006 *Wired* magazine article,^[19] open innovation, promoted by Henry Chesbrough,^[20] a professor and executive director at the Garwood Center for Corporate Innovation at Berkeley, and consultant Don Tapscott's and Anthony D. Williams's *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*,^[21] a book that popularized the concept of corporations using mass collaboration and open source innovation.

Of this rapid morphing of co-creation, Ramaswamy and his co-author Francis Gouillart wrote: “Through their interactions with thousands of managers globally who had begun experimenting with co-creation, they discovered that enterprises were building platforms that engaged not only the firm and its customers but also the entire network of suppliers, partners, and employees, in a continuous development of new experiences with individuals.”^[22]

The rise of cocreation could be attributed to three distinct issues as suggested by O'hern & Rindfleisch (2010).^[23]

- The information asymmetry between customer demands and manufacturer capability

Traditionally, firms have attempted to manage this asymmetry by engaging in various forms of marketing research to obtain better information about their customers' needs.

- Customer empowerment: Consumers are seeking a more active role beyond consumption

Growing customer empowerment appears to be rapidly promoting customer co-creation by motivating consumers to play a more active role in the new product development (NPD) process, enhancing their NPD

knowledge and skills, and connecting them with proactive communities of like-minded individuals.

- The advent and widespread application of digital technology

The Internet has increased access to knowledge that can enhance consumers' ability to engage in creative pursuits and to apply their knowledge by providing access to a variety of online design tools. The Internet also enhances collective co-creation by connecting individual consumers with others (both consumers and manufacturers) in a manner that allows them to participate effectively in a co-creation community.

Successful co-creation requires two key steps.^[23]

Contribution of ideas: A firm must convince its customers to submit their ideas (i.e., to contribute). However, receiving contribution is actually quite hard because most customers are quite busy and hardly care about the company's call. Unless customers are incentivized in an attractive way they are reluctant to participate and benefit the company. As a result, most co-creation efforts fail because they don't get many submissions.

Selecting the viable ideas: After receiving the contributions, the firm must then select the most profitable, viable and implementable ones. The challenge of the selection process is that most submissions are not very useful, impractical and difficult to implement. Firms have to deal the submitted ideas in a very subtle way as throughout the process they don't want to reject customer submissions and risk of alienating them which may eventually lead to customer disengagement.

DeConi – Greenest Agency in Bulgaria since 2012

DeConi is a strategic marketing consultancy based in Sofia, Bulgaria. For more than 20 years DeConi have been building for their clients strong sustainable brands, drivers of positive social change. DeConi is a pioneer of responsible marketing in Eastern Europe and is the first B Corporation in the region.

DeConi – a Bulgarian advertising agency, was first distinguished as the greenest company in the Media, Communications, and PR category of the b2b Media competition for Greenest Company in Bulgaria for the year 2012.

“Being responsible in our everyday life is the least that we at DeConi can do for the environment. It is the high profile public awareness campaigns that we develop and implement together with our clients that are most satisfactory to me, for they reach millions of people and especially kids. This is great because they are real investment in the green future of Bulgaria and the planet.” said Mila Aleksieva, Senior Account Manager at DeConi, when receiving the award.

**DeConi:
Pioneering Marketing Innovations
In Creating Brand Value and Sustainable Social Change**

The agency has developed and applied a number of proprietary innovative marketing tools such as *Eco Labyrinth*, *3D Ecobus*, *Become Ecohero*. They have proven to be extremely effective in attracting public attention and building awareness on topics like separate collection and recycling of packaging waste, nature protection and sustainable development. They have provided knowledge and brought about changes in attitudes and behavior of millions of consumers in Bulgaria and Macedonia.

The innovativeness and effectiveness of these marketing tools have been widely recognized by the professional community as well. They were awarded at some of the most prestigious international and local sustainable marketing communications and PR excellence competitions like ISWA Communication Awards, IPRA Golden World Awards, National Innovation Forum, BAPRA Bright Awards, PR Priz.

Currently DeConi is seeking to expand its operations on a broader international basis. DeConi are confident in the potential of these already tested and proven instruments in different economic and cultural environments and in their ability to motivate consumers all over the world to make informed rational purchasing choices and separately collect and recycle their waste and thus contribute to the sustainable development of their communities and the preservation of nature.

Through Ecopack Bulgaria, the leading packaging recovery organization in the country, member of PRO Europe and EXPRA, since 2013 DeConi has had the opportunity to develop and execute a number of activities for Tetra Pak, like the *Empty Box is Full* (of natural resources) school competition, the *UBC Capital of Europe* school competition and series of high profile events, and the *Eco Labyrinth* campaign carried out in eight Bulgarian cities. The major objective of all of them is to raise public awareness about recyclability of used beverage cartons and the benefits of their separate collection and recycling for society and nature.

Eco Labyrinth

The *Eco Labyrinth* is a unique innovative educational instrument through which children acquire new knowledge about beverage cartons and their recyclability in an entertaining and memorable way.

Clients: Tetra Pak, Ecopack Bulgaria

3D Ecobus

The *3D Ecobus* is a globally unique innovative mobile information and education center – a bus with 50 seats and state-of-the-art 3D video and

audio equipment and Audience Response System and educational packages tailored for various target audiences.

Clients: Ecopack Bulgaria, Pakomak (Macedonia)

Become Ecohero

The *Become Ecohero: Teach everyone at home to collect waste separately!* project turns school children into change makers and ambassadors of the green idea and separate waste collection to their families and communities.

Clients: Ecopack Bulgaria

Green Challenge

Green Challenge is an entertaining event, a combination of workshops, interactive quiz and sports activities, with high educational value.

Clients: Ecopack Bulgaria, Tetra Pak, ProCredit Bank Bulgaria, Kamenitza (Molson Coors), OnProcess Technology Bulgaria, Coca-Cola Hellenic Bulgaria

Ready to launch projects

Pop-up Classroom

An inflatable room with state of the art video and sound equipment delivering world-class educational programs on any subject, to any target audience, anywhere.

Green I

A series of events centered around augmented reality based entertaining experience in which video material shot on the spot is mixed with a premade wildlife video. The resulting 40 sec. film is directly uploaded on Facebook so it could be immediately viewed, liked and shared. The accompanying exhibition and website further reinforces the connection between used packaging separate collection and recycling, on the one hand, and forests and wildlife preservation, on the other, and encourages individual responsibility for protecting the environment.

Green School Awards

National Green School Awards encourages environmentally responsible education and behavior in Bulgarian schools. It awards students' efforts in three categories - Green Knowledge, Green Behavior and Green art.

3D ECOBUS

I. Defining the communication problem

Separate waste collection by the households is directly related to the process of sustainable development, as a vital part of the environmental preservation and the effective use of natural resources. According to data

from a nationally representative surveys done by GfK in the period 2008-2011, the main reasons for the Bulgarian households not to collect their waste separately are lack of information, distrust in the process of transportation and separation as well as simple indifference.

Ecopack Bulgaria, the largest organization for utilization of package waste in the country, operates in 96 municipalities with 2 855 000 citizens in total and has 19 600 containers located in those regions. One of the main activities of the company is “to promote separate collection amongst society and to foster new ecological habits”.

The research results analysis, as well as the 2011 public awareness campaign “Put the Green Dot! Separate Your Waste!”, revealed a stable throughout the years tendency – a strong relation between the degree of positive attitude towards separate waste collection and practicing it on the one side, and age, on the other, i.e. with age the negative attitude and mistrust in the process of separate waste collection grows. For example:

“Do you separate your waste at home?”

	15 - 25 yo	26 - 35 yo	36 - 45 yo	46 - 55 yo	56 - 65 yo	66 - 75 yo
Yes	29,8%	28,2%	23,4%	20,3%	15,0%	8,8%
No	70,2%	71,8%	76,6%	79,7%	85,0%	91,2%

Source: GfK, 2010 г.

This tendency predetermined their strategic approach – to target children in a unique way. With 3D Ecobus.

II. Strategic approach

The 3D Ecobus is a universal mobile informational and educational center – a unique on a worldwide scale innovative instrument for effective education anywhere.

The center is an entirely branded bus of the latest model with 50 seats, with modern equipment for 3D projections. It presents to selected audiences at convenient locations three dimensional educational films, developed by professionals in the relative fields. The center also uses an Audience Response System (ARS) for evaluation the efficiency of the training process.

DeConi directed their efforts first of all towards primary school students. At this age they are grown enough to comprehend the separate waste collection concept and its benefits to society and the environment. A change is also most easily achievable with children because of their lacking firm habits, ergo no correction of negative habits and behavior is needed. From strictly operational point of view, the advantage of working with this

target group is that it's organized and relatively easy to reach through the centralized structures of the educational system. At the same time, children of that age are capable of strong influence over their parents' behavior. Therefore this target group has the highest price efficiency and the longest term of invested resources turnover.

The campaign's focus also remained on state and municipal representatives and employees of international and Bulgarian companies.

Thus the major characteristics of DeConi's strategic approach in communicating the concept for separate waste collection and preservation of the environment to their target groups are:

1. *Building a collaborative model for effective change* – the problems are too complex and extensive therefore DeConi involved in the process:
 - Government organizations such as the Ministry of Environment and Water and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science
 - Regional education bodies of inspectors
 - Municipal administrations
 - School management
 - Organized forms of children's activities like school workshops
 - Bulgarian and International companies
 - NGOs
 - Local and national media
2. *Maximum efficiency in the long run* – directing their efforts towards the target group where quickly and with minimum resources maximum long-term results could be achieved.
3. *Innovation* – use of 3D technology, interactive forms of training and ARS.
4. *High effectiveness* – informational and educational process optimized to the highest degree, allowing a large number of people to pass the training course within day
5. *Flexibility* – considering the mobility, there's an opportunity to have different target groups pass the training course within a day
6. *High quality well-targeted training* – educational content, especially developed for each of the target groups
7. *Wide range* – the campaign was implemented in dozens of Bulgarian municipalities.
8. *High level of accountability* – results of the process are measured with high level of punctuality through the ARS
9. *Continuity* – extending the educational process with a specially developed website that includes additional information and informational resources
- 10.

III. More information about implementation of the project

In the preparatory phase of the project:

- The bus was entirely facilitated with state of the art video and audio equipment;
- A 3D movie for children entitled “The Lords of Recycling” was created. It explains in an entertaining and intelligible for the core target group way the process of recycling and its significance to the environment and society;
- A 2D film adaptation for adults entitled “The Path of Waste” was created
- Separate training programs and the “Be an Eco-hero” game-test were developed for 3 target groups – students from the 1st and the 2nd grade, students from the 3rd and the 4th grade and adults.
- A website for additional information and a game encouraging the use of the website were developed (<http://ecopack.bg/ecobus>) .

The actual phase of the project was launched in front of the media and the institutions which are directly related to the process of separate waste collection. The Minister of Environment and Water, the Minister of Education, Youth and Science and the Mayor of Sofia, as well as leading on- and offline national media representatives were welcomed to the 3D Ecobus.

The trainings themselves were conducted in accordance to a preliminary appointed and coordinated with the relative institutions/companies schedule in the following pattern – the 3D Ecobus enters the school yard/company office/venue of the event, the trainees enter the vehicle and within one school hour they listen to a brief lecture, watch a film, ask their questions after which they test the newly acquired knowledge in the game-test and ARS.

At their departure everybody receives a special gift – seeds from pine spruce and acacia they can plant on their own thus make Bulgaria more green. With the unique codes on the back of their seed packages children can register on the project’s website, to receive additional information and get the opportunity to win a prize.

IV. Information about efficiency and achievements of the project

In the period 2011-2015 the campaign was held in 950 schools and kindergartens in 107 municipalities. Employees of companies like Coca-Cola, Heineken, Globul, Caven Orbico, Carlsberg and more also went through the 3D Ecobus training program.

Over 1500,000 children and more than a 5,000 adults have gone through the training in that period. The website registrations are approximately 40,000. The game-tests played at the end of each training showed average level of comprehension for 90% of the trainees.

Apart from its coverage in the National media, the arrival of the unique 3D Ecobus in each new city is extensively reported for in the local media which also draws the community's attention to the problems of separate collection, the environment's preservation and the sustainable development. Thus, through the 3D Ecobus trainees and the media, the principal messages of the campaign reached hundreds of thousands of Bulgarian households and accomplished a change in the attitude and the behavior, the results of which will be shown in decades to come.

One-minute video about the project could be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucdDqfVSVLc>

**BECOME ECOHERO:
TEACH EVERYONE AT HOME TO COLLECT WASTE
SEPARATELY!**

Separate waste collection by the households and recycling are directly related to the process of sustainable development and is a vital part of environmental preservation and the effective use of natural recourses.

According to Eurostat in 2012 42% on average of the household waste in the European Union is recycled or composted. Leaders are Germany (65%) and Belgium (56%), at the bottom of the table are Romania (1%) and Malta (13%). With its 24% Bulgaria is still lagging behind the EU average.

According to data from a nationally representative surveys done by JTN Research in November 2014 39% of Bulgarians declare that they do not collect waste at home separately (43% in 2013). The main reasons for the Bulgarian households not to collect their waste separately, besides the purely technical as lack of containers nearby, are lack of information, distrust in the process of transportation and separation and indifference as well as simple laziness.

This is why the central communication problem a public awareness campaign for promoting separate waste collection is facing, is that it has *to achieve change simultaneously in three different directions*. This defines the following **major objectives**:

- Cognitive change
- Increase the understanding among the target groups of the separate waste collection process and the benefits for society and the environment.

- Attitudinal change
 - Increase public trust in the separate waste collection process;
 - Create positive attitude and emotional bond with the entire concept.
- Behavioral change
 - Create stable habits for separate waste collection among the target groups;
 - Increase the volume of separately collected waste and reduce the volume of landfills.

Another major characteristics of the communication problem is the fact that virtually anybody could participate in the separate waste collection process, regardless of gender, age, income, residence, etc. Thus the campaign should target groups that are as diverse as possible.

The targeting problem is further complicated by the fact that Ecopack Bulgaria, the client commissioning the campaign, operates in just part of Bulgarian municipalities (70 out of 265) and even in part of the neighborhoods in a single city. This makes the use of national media ineffective and requires precise targeting with local communication channels and smart non-media communication.

The strategic approach that DeConi developed to solve the communication problem and make effective change in both the understanding, the attitude towards and the practical involvement in separate waste collection is based on the following **strategic principles**:

1. Effective interaction chain
 2. Collaboration
 3. Innovation
 4. Co-creation
 5. Long-termism
1. ***Effective interaction chain***– prioritization and involvement of the target groups into interaction to achieve *snowball effect*

To do that DeConi targeted primarily first to eight graders, because:

- At this age the students are mature enough to comprehend the recycling and sustainable development concepts and the benefits to society and the environment.
- A change is easily achievable with children – they lack firm habits ergo no correction of negative habits and behavior is needed.
- The communication with this particular target group has the highest price efficiency and the longest term of invested resources turnover.

Children of this age are able to actively influence the behavior of their parents. It is first of all for that reason they were involved in the campaign as an *effective transmission of ideas and behaviors for the whole family*. To reach them DeConi used the centralized structures of the state

educational system and created the effective interaction chain “municipal administration-school management-teacher-student-parent-family”.

2. **Collaboration** – building of wide coalition

Finding appropriate allies is a must when solving complex societal problems and this is why DeConi involved in the campaign:

- Ministry of Education and Science
- Regional education bodies of inspectors
- Municipal administrations
- School management
- Organized forms of children’s activities like school workshops
- Bulgarian and International companies
- NGOs
- Media

Each of them contributed with its unique expertise and experience.

3. **Innovation** – creation of a multifunctional mechanism

The innovation is in:

- Ensuring the interaction between child and parent by making it mandatory for participation in the campaign.
- Simultaneous impact in all three directions – cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral through effective combination of off- and online communication channels.
- Stimulating the participation at each level of the chain municipal administration-school management-teacher-student-parent-family DeConi have created.

4. **Co-creation** – involvement of the target groups in the creation of the campaign online platform

Through the Facebook page children and parents were invited to create and send us their own quiz questions on protection of the environment thus developing the major educational component of the campaign – the online quiz.

5. **Long-termism** – creation and maintenance of long-term relationship with green-minded families

- A database with tens of thousands email addresses is created in the course of the campaign to be utilized in forthcoming national or local environmental protection campaigns of Ecopack.
- The *Ekohero Club* membership card gives access to all seasonal quizzes organized four times a year around specific topics like climate change, forests, water, air pollution, etc.

6. **Scale** – 100% coverage of the municipalities in which the campaign is carried out and gradual inclusion of more and more cities.

The strategic approach of the *Become Ecohero: Teach Everyone at Home to Collect Waste Separately!* campaign was implemented through the following mechanism:

Online platform with educational quiz in which teams of child and parent compete among themselves. The registration is made with a unique code written on a special membership card for *Ekohero Club* receives by the child at school. The team answers questions related to recycling and environmental protection. Each correct answer carries points. All who have collected the necessary number of points become members of the *Ekohero Club* and participate in a raffle for a variety of prizes. The school with the highest number of students-*ecoheroes* is also awarded. Awards are presented at a special event covered by local media.

Pilot project

The effectiveness of the approach of the campaign was tested in a pilot project in 31 schools in the city of Sofia. The results were more than encouraging, so DeConi proceed with the implementation of the campaign.

Campaign

In 2015 the campaign was held in 13 municipalities: Kyustendil, Montana, Shumen, Silistra Municipality, Dulovo, Haskovo, Ruse, Pleven, Veliko Tarnovo, Plovdiv, Varna, Vratsa and Pernik.

Activities:

1. Adjustments of the online platform resulting from the the pilot project feedback (<http://ecopack.bg/game/>) .
2. Periodical update of the pool of questions with the received proposals from the target groups as part of the of co-creation process.
3. Development and production of *Ekohero Club* membership cards with a unique codes, information brochures and posters.
4. Organization of support from the Ministry of Education and Science.
5. Securing of assistance by the municipal administration and organizing in each town meetings with school directors for presenting the campaign, discussing its implementation in each school and providing them with *Ekohero Club* membership cards and information materials.
6. PR campaign in local electronic, print and online media.
7. Launch of the Facebook page of the campaign where anyone can upload pictures of green initiatives and proposals for the campaign.
8. Implementation of the competition in each town – for four weeks the online platform is open to students with their parents to participate in the quiz. All who give 8 correct answers to 10 questions become *ecoheroes*.
9. Drawing of the winners among the *ecoheroes*. The winning school is the one with highest number of participants. Prizes for each city are:

- For children – 5 tablet and 50 books;
 - For families – 5 voucher worth BGN 50 for Technopolis hypermarket chain;
 - For the winning school – LCD projector.
10. Presenting the awards at a special event in the presence of the mayor and the school management.
 11. Coverage of the event in the local media – second PR wave.
 12. Sending of “Thank you” letters via direct mail to all *ecoheroes*.
 13. Evaluation of the results and fine-tuning of the campaign model.

The results of the campaign *Become Ecohero: Teach Everyone at Home to Collect Waste Separately!* were extremely high by all standards. The enthusiasm with which students and their families participated in it surpassed their expectations. The total number of participating families is 17 128. This is 30% of the 1-8 grade schoolchildren in the schools in the respective municipalities. A total of 162 schools, or 98 % of all invited, took part with their representatives.

These results were achieved with minimal financial resources due to the strategic approach and the campaign mechanism developed on its base. The key factors for achieving this success are the *effective interaction chain* municipal administration-school-student-parent-family and the incentives for participation at every level.

These results encouraged Ecopack Bulgaria to extend the campaign in 2016 as well and cover by the end of the school year five more municipalities.

ECO LABYRINTH

I. Definition of the communication problem

Are used beverage cartons (UBC) recycled? If recycled, how are they collected separately, in which container should they be disposed of? In fact, what are they made of? These are questions that in Bulgaria even people with environmentally responsible behavior and established habits in separate waste collection often ask themselves.

Nationally representative surveys of JTN Research, conducted in November 2013 and in November 2014 show that the share of those collecting their waste separately is slowly increasing – from 57% to 61%. However, a stable one third of those already won for the cause of recycling do not include UBC in their separately collected waste.

The major reason for that, according to the surveys, is the lack of knowledge about beverage cartons as a multifunctional type of packaging, about the materials they are made of, and their recyclability.

As a matter of fact, until recently this type of so called composite

packaging was not processed in Bulgaria, for the process of separation for recycling of the different kinds of materials it is made of – cardboard, plastic and often aluminum – is rather complex. It was in 2013 that Ecopack, the leading Bulgarian waste recovery organization, and Tetra Pak, the largest food packaging company in the world, launched a pilot UBC collection project in the cities of Sofia, Plovdiv and Burgas.

In 2015, another eight smaller cities were to join the UBC collecting community in Bulgaria. The communication problem in this particular situation was as complex as this type of packaging itself – DeConi had to get across the message about protecting natural resources by UBC recycling, with all the benefits for society and nature, to all diverse “layers” of society. The responsibility for the protection of the environment and the sustainable development of their communities lies with each and every one of us, regardless of age, gender, education, occupation, etc.

On the other hand DeConi had to develop the right communication approach towards those:

- already collecting separately all their waste, UBC included, and reinforce their choice;
- who do not include UBC in their separately collected waste and motivate them to make this extra effort;
- 39% who do not bother at all to participate in household waste recycling and provoke a sustainable change in their behavior.

The fact that DeConi had to operate in eight separate small communities was also to be considered in the communication channels selection process.

II. Strategic approach and innovations - goals, tasks, messages, target audiences, expected results, research, criteria for efficient evaluation

The **major objectives** of the campaign in these eight cities were to:

- educate consumers about the environmental and economic benefits of recycling of UBC and used packaging in general;
- encourage environmentally responsible behavior like separating the household waste and making informed and active purchasing choices;
- contribute to reaching the amount of separately collected UBC in the respective municipalities, set in the projections of Ecopack and Tetra Pak.

To achieve that DeConi had to successfully get across the message that instead of piling up in landfills and contaminating the soil, the water and the air for hundreds of years, the materials that UBC are made of could be well utilized by the economy, especially in times of crisis.

The target group of such a campaign is in fact the entire household. However, DeConi directed their efforts primarily towards *schoolchildren*, because:

- They are mature enough to comprehend the recycling and sustainable development concepts and the benefits to society and environment.
- A change is easily achievable with children – they lack firm habits, ergo no correction of negative habits and behavior is needed.
- The communication with this particular target group has the high price efficiency and ROI.

Children are able to actively influence the behavior of their parents. It is first of all for that reason they were involved in the campaign – as effective transmitters of ideas and behaviors for the whole family.

At the same time DeConi targeted:

- *parents* – directly, with activities in retail chains – the place where packaged food starts its journey to their homes;
- *the general public* – with campaigns in off- and online media.

To achieve the objectives of the campaign in the most effective way, DeConi developed an approach based on the following **strategic principles**:

1. *Innovation* – create unique mechanism based on a single idea, able to clearly communicate the problem the campaign seeks to solve and at the same time capture the imagination of the target groups and motivate them to actively participate.
2. *Collaboration* – build wide coalition of partners able to contribute to reaching the objectives of the campaign with their unique expertise and experience, like municipal administrations, school management, local NGOs, businesses and media.
3. *Co-creation* – involve through social media the core target group in the creation of the educational content of the campaign.
4. *Maximum reach* – create a media mix with optimal balance between paid and owned media and use mechanisms that fully utilize the potential of social media.
5. *Flexibility* – develop campaign mechanics applicable to different target groups in terms of age and educational level and able to cover a wide variety of topics in various fields of knowledge.

Criteria for the assessment of campaign results

- Number of people reached;
- Number of participants in the events, including number of participating schools;
- Quantity of collected UBC.

III. Implementation of the project – time management, terms of the campaign, finalization of the project

Eco Labyrinth, the public awareness tool DeConi created following their strategic principles, places schoolchildren and adults alike in the shoes of humanity – in a labyrinth full of environmental choices. Greed and indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources have led humankind deep into a labyrinth of numerous critical environmental problems. It is only through knowledge and perseverance that an exit could be found.

How does Eco Labyrinth work? This is a specially designed custom-made inflatable labyrinth with eleven chambers. In each chamber a question is asked to the participant. There are two answers, each of them printed on the curtain marking one of two possible paths. One of the answers is correct and it leads you to the next chamber and eventually out of the labyrinth. The other is wrong, it takes you to a dead end. Once there, an info board gives you the opportunity to learn more about that particular subject so when you go back you can make the right choice and continue your quest.

The campaign took place in the cities of Vratza, Montana, Kyustendil, Dupnitsa, Pazardjik, Peshtera, Pernik, and Botevgrad in the period 1 August – 18 October 2015 and was carried out in two phases.

Phase One: Information campaign, targeting consumers in general

- 1,200 info posters were placed near supermarkets and in busy pedestrian areas. The posters explained in a direct and easy to understand way what the beverage cartons are, the materials they are made of, and why DeConi should collect them separately and recycle them.
- 40,000 info leaflets with eye-catching design were distributed by local teams at other retail outlets. The leaflets complemented the posters and provided more detailed information about the beverage cartons and the benefits of recycling them for their community, society and the environment as a whole.

Phase Two: Series of high profile events at central city locations, targeting primarily schoolchildren

Announcement

- Radio spots in local radio stations;
- Posters on streets and bus stops;
- Facebook campaign covering only IP addresses in the respective city and the surrounding areas;
- Direct mail campaign with letters to principals and posters in all schools in the city;
- PR publications in local media.

A special Facebook quiz involved their target audience in a process of co-creation, generating the educational content (the questions and answers) to be used in the Labyrinth.

Events

Events centered the Eco Labyrinth were held in all eight cities on Saturdays and Sundays. To enter the Labyrinth each participant was to provide an “entrance fee” – one used beverage carton. And then the journey began: What reusable materials can be found in UBC? How many trees do DeConi save by recycling one ton of cardboard? How many years does it take for a plastic bag to decompose in nature? Who is responsible for separate waste collection at home? etc. Step by step, the right answers lead to the exit. And to the well-deserved rewards – a special notebook with information about recycling and its effects on the environment and a sachet with flower seeds to plant at home with the whole family. At the exit, a picture of each participant was taken and uploaded on the Facebook page of Ecopack.

Two workshops further enhanced the Eco Labyrinth experience:

- Paper recycling workshop – a presentation that demonstrates in an easy to understand way the processes of separation of the materials UBC are made of and of preparation of paper out of paper mash.
- Plastic recycling workshop – preparation of various ornaments out of old plastic bottles – a good example how by reusing packaging DeConi can contribute on a daily basis to a cleaner and greener environment.

Press releases were distributed prior to and after the events to ensure media presence and proper coverage of the campaign.

IV. Efficiency and achievements

The **combined population of the eight cities** in which the campaign was carried out is **419,942** (NSI, 2015). The message that instead of polluting their cities UBC could be utilized in the economy as a source of valuable materials **reached at least two thirds of them:**

In the First Phase this was achieved through

- 40,000 leaflets;
- 1,200 posters;

In the Second Phase, through

- 310 radio spots;
- 800 posters;
- direct mail to all 123 schools in these cities
- Facebook
 - 102,848 reached;
 - 11,603 likes of the uploaded photos;
 - 625 participants in the Quiz

The campaign was covered by and its messages reached the audiences of

- 5 TV stations;

- 6 radio stations (paid broadcasts not included);
- 7 newspapers;
- 29 info websites.

Direct participation in the Eco Labyrinth events:

- 3,367 schoolchildren;
- 90 schools;
- 755 adults.

Collecting UBC on the spot was not among the primary goals of the campaign, however 5,050 UBC were collected during the events.

The ROI of the campaign will be precisely measured once the data on the separately collected and delivered for recycling UBC in the respective municipalities in the 6 months after the campaign period is available.

Because of the excellent results of the Eco Labyrinth campaign one more event was carried out in the city of Kazanlak in November 2015 and five more are scheduled for the first half of 2016 alone.

One-minute video about the project could be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIqDvGPbCh0>

Conclusion

In the end of 2015 DeConi undertook procedure for evaluation of the innovation potential of the agency. It was carried out by IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy through Enterprise Europe Network represented by ARC Fund . It was based on the Academy's international standard compliant assessment tools and the world's largest benchmarking database on innovation management, through which companies can compare their innovation management capabilities and performances against the average scores of thousands of other companies, their direct or indirect competitors.

This evaluation assesses five dimensions: Innovation Strategy, Innovation Organisation and Culture, Innovation Life Cycle Processes, Enabling Factors and Innovation Results and employs tools like A.T. Kearney "House of Innovation".

The overall score of DeConi's innovation management performance is 59%, compared to 53% of the Growth Champions and the 50% of the average of its benchmarking class.

The evaluation covered a three-year period. Its focus were four specific innovative marketing instruments developed by the agency for its clients and implemented in impactful public awareness campaigns in Bulgaria and abroad – 3D Ecobus, Green Challenge, Become Ecohero and Ecolabyrinth as well as the overall performance of the agency.

In Macedonia 36,000 children from 110 schools became part of the unique 3D Ecobus experience.

<http://www.edubus3d.eu/>

<http://www.ecopack.bg/ecobus/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hISGwTxNsLY>

Awards

- First Place, Green Communications and Urban Environment category, PR Priz, Bulgarian Public Relations Society, Sofia 2013;
- Finalist, Environmental category, International PR Association Golden World Awards, Cologne 2013;
- Second Place, International Solid Waste Association Communication Awards, Vienna 2013;
- Second Place, Sustainable Development Campaign category, Bright Awards, Bulgarian Association of PR Agencies, Sofia 2013;
- The Greenest Company, Media, Communications and PR category (DeConi), b2b Media Greenest companies in Bulgaria Competition, Sofia 2013;
- Green Innovation, Innovative Enterprise of the Year, National Innovation Forum, Sofia 2013;
- First Place, Investor in Environment category (Ecopack), Annual Responsible Business Awards, Bulgarian Business Leader Forum, Sofia 2014.
- National Award for CSR Company, Protection of the Environment by Small and Medium Enterprises category, Skopje 2015



BECOME ECOHERO

The *Become Ecohero: Teach everyone at home to collect waste separately!* project turns school children into change makers and ambassadors of the green idea and separate waste collection to their families and communities.



First to ninth graders in selected cities receive *Ecohero Club* membership cards at school. With the unique code on the card, the child, together with a parent or other family member, could register on the website of the campaign and participate in an educational quiz with questions about environmental protection. All who give the required number of correct answers become *ecoheroes* and participate in a raffle. The school with the highest number of participants is also awarded. The whole campaign and award ceremonies are extensively covered by local and national media.

The membership card gives access to other advanced quizzes on nature preservation and sustainable development. Through the Facebook page, *ecoheroes* could participate in a co-creation process by sending their own quiz questions or by posting information about their participation in green initiatives, thus setting example to others. The database created in the process is used for communication with this target group in other awareness campaigns and green initiatives.

The strategic approach of the campaign is based on principles like *effective interaction chain, cooperation, innovation, co-creation, long-termism and scale*.

In the period January 2015 – March 2016 the campaign was held in 19 cities and 28,140 school children from 275 schools (35% of all school children in the respective cities) became *ecoheroes*.

<http://ecopack.bg/game/ecohero/>

<https://www.facebook.com/clubEcohero?fref=ts>

Awards

- First Place, Communication Agency with Green Project category, BG Green Awards, Sofia 2015;
- Second Place, Sustainable Development Campaign category, Bright Awards, Bulgarian Association of PR Agencies, Sofia 2015;
- Second Place, Green Communications and Urban Environment category, PR Priz, Bulgarian Public Relations Society, Sofia 2016.



ECO LABYRINTH

The *Eco Labyrinth* is a unique innovative educational instrument with which in an entertaining and memorable way children acquire new knowledge about beverage cartons and their recyclability.



The event is taking place at the central town square on Saturday or Sunday. In order to enter the labyrinth each child, with or without a parent, should provide “entrance fee” – one UBC. In each chamber in the labyrinth there are two gates each of them covered with curtain with a question and an answer one of them right, the other – wrong. The right answers lead the way out of the labyrinth, the wrong answers – to a dead end. Upon exiting the child receives a present.

All questions are related to UBC. On the walls of the dead end chambers there are posters with the right answer and some additional information on the respective issue.

The labyrinth (which is inflatable, i.e. easy to deploy and transport) is the central attraction in the event. There are also a plastic recycling workshop and UBC recycling presentation.

3 367 children from 90 schools passed through the labyrinth and more than 4 000 UBC were collected during the events in 8 Bulgarian cities in the period September – October 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPytEJ2BN6g>

Awards

- First Place, Green Communications and Urban Environment category, PR Priz, Bulgarian Public Relations Society, Sofia 2016.



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